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Four Conceptions of Linguistic Disadvantage

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Abstract

Policy makers need a conception of linguistic disadvantage to supply guidance about the relative priority of inequalities with a linguistic dimension and to inform decisions about whether such inequalities require correction or compensation. A satisfactory conception of linguistic disadvantage will make it possible to compare the situations of speakers of different languages and to assess the normative significance of a range of linguistic inequalities. This paper evaluates four rival conceptions and asks whether they satisfy these criteria. Respectively, these conceptions associate linguistic disadvantage with inadequate communicative opportunities, with being unable to do the things that one cares about, with lacking (access to) important resources, and with capability deprivation. It is argued that a conception of linguistic disadvantage derived from the capabilities approach is the most promising option available to policy makers.

Introduction

Because linguistic environments reward different language repertoires unequally, speakers of different languages can be advantaged or disadvantaged depending on how their language repertoire 'fits' with their linguistic environment. In this paper I explore four different accounts about when it might be appropriate to describe an individual or group as experiencing *linguistic disadvantage*: because they have inadequate communicative opportunities; because they cannot do the things they care about; because they lack (access to) important resources; or because they are deprived of the capability to achieve important human functionings. Ultimately, I argue that the final option is the most promising, and that a person suffers linguistic disadvantage within a given linguistic environment when for linguistic reasons she lacks the effective freedom to do and be particular things that are valuable or worthwhile.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I discuss a range of linguistic inequalities. These inequalities are defined not by their type but by their source, and each arises because linguistic environments inevitably reward different language repertoires to greater and lesser extents. Second, I argue that policy makers will need a single conception of linguistic disadvantage if they are to implement public policies to address linguistic inequalities. This conception should enable us to both compare the situations of speakers of different languages and to evaluate the normative significance of linguistic inequalities against other social, economic and political inequalities. Third, I explore four such conceptions, and argue that one based on the capabilities approach is the most promising.

Linguistic Inequalities

The forms of advantage and disadvantage addressed in this paper arise because linguistic environments reward different language repertoires unequally. A 'linguistic environment' refers to the 'linguistic dimensions of the surroundings in which people live' and consists in the 'sum total' of a society's 'demolinguistic and sociolinguistic features' (Grin 2003, 178). Thus, it includes the different languages that are used in a space, the number of speakers they have, the extent to which they are recognised by official institutions and within civil society, the different statuses they have, and the different functions they are used for.[1] Meanwhile, a 'language repertoire' refers to the range of languages an individual person can speak, read, understand and write, as well as their various competences in these respective activities.

Linguistic environments inevitably confer advantages on people who are highly competent users of particular languages, such as those which are widely spoken or used for official business. Correspondingly, they disadvantage those who are less competent in such languages, and perhaps also those who prefer to use a minority language. Moreover, alterations in a linguistic environment may improve or worsen a person's prospects, for instance by increasing or decreasing the availability of employment opportunities, or by symbolically affirming the value of their identity. Thus, people's lives are heavily influenced by the way in which their language repertoire 'fits' the linguistic environment they inhabit.

[1] A linguistic environment is an analytical construct that can be applied to many different domains, including most obviously nation-states, but also to smaller territories like regions and cities, as well as to larger ones like the European Union. Linguistic environments need not be territorially defined, and in some circumstances it might be helpful to refer to the linguistic environment of particular industries, such as software engineering or academia, or to the linguistic environment of particular media, such as the internet.

There are a number of different ways in which a linguistic environment might give rise to linguistic inequalities. Perhaps the most widely studied of these are the different employment prospects available to people because of their linguistic competences (see, e.g., Albouy 2008; Bleakley & Chin 2004; Chiswick & Miller 1995, 1998, 2007, 2010; Chiswick & Taengnoi 2007; Di Paolo & Raymond 2012; Fry & Lowell 2003; Kossoudji 1988; Stöhr 2015; Toomet 2011). Every linguistic environment benefits job seekers who can speak particular languages, including both official languages and the lingua franca. Sometimes this is because familiarity with a locally dominant language is a requirement for holding particular kinds of positions (such as jobs that require communicating with the public), and sometimes it is because particular jobs are reserved for native speakers of particular languages, as is sometimes the case in the educational, publishing and translation sectors.

The content of an employee's language repertoire may also influence her prospects for promotion. For example, people who are less familiar with the language used within an organisation may appear hesitant or indecisive, or they may come across as less personable or competent, and their achievements and abilities may be overlooked. Moreover, even when a worker is highly proficient in the primary language used in an organisation, her language repertoire could still influence her career advancement, if competence in additional languages is rewarded or required, as is often the case in multinational corporations and international organisations, as well in the education and hospitality sectors.

Empirical studies suggest that the connection between language repertoire and wages is quite complex. A number of studies have focussed on immigrant labour market performance. Here, it has been found that majority language competence in general is

associated with increased earnings, and that more proficient majority language users tend to earn more than less proficient majority language users. For example, a recent survey of country-specific studies concludes that 'dominant language proficiency among immigrants is rewarded rather handsomely around the globe' (Chiswick and Miller 2014, 243). However, this picture is complicated by at least two things. First, the connections between majority language competence and earnings may be stronger in some employment fields than in others. For example, Berman, Lang and Siniver (2000) found that software specialists and technicians in Israel benefited from learning Hebrew, but that construction workers and gas attendants did not. Second, at least in some cases the connections between majority language competence and earnings may also be influenced by gender. For example, Yao and van Ours (2015) found that whilst female immigrants in Holland with poor Dutch language skills earned less than their counterparts with strong Dutch language skills, this relation did not hold for male immigrants.

The influence of supplementary language learning on labour market performance is similarly complex. In Anglophone countries, the premium for speaking another language in addition to English has been found to be low (Fry & Lowell 2003; Saiz & Zoido 2005). Meanwhile, knowledge of English often attracts generous returns in countries where it is not an official language. For example, Grin (2001) has found that fluency in English amongst French- and German-speaking men in Switzerland is associated with higher earnings, and similar results have also been found in Germany (Stöhr 2015) and Israel (Lang & Siniver 2009). Strikingly, one recent study found that Russian-speakers in Estonia and Lativa received better returns from learning English than from learning the official languages (Toomet 2011). Meanwhile, the benefits of

learning another official language in bi- or multilingual societies vary considerably. In Canada, for example, Anglophones receive only a modest benefit for learning French in Quebec, and no benefit at all in the other provinces (Albouy 2008). By contrast employees in Catalonia with knowledge of Catalan earn 18% more than those without (Di Paolo & Raymond 2012).

Outside the sphere of employment, familiarity with a widely-used language can attract other direct and indirect economic benefits. For instance, a direct benefit accrued by some speakers of privileged languages is the competitive advantage it potentially confers within particular domains, such as the 'cultural industries'. One example of this is the emergence of a global publishing industry, in which books published in English not only have a wider 'ready-made' audience than books published in most other languages, but are also more likely to be translated into other languages (Van Parijs 2011, 94). Meanwhile, an indirect economic benefit of familiarity with a privileged language is that it can provide its speakers with more opportunities to access advantage conferring institutions, such as universities and career networks. Similarly, being able to efficiently navigate social, commercial and public institutions can indirectly benefit speakers of privileged languages by reducing or eliminating a variety of transaction costs, or by allowing people to make more efficient consumption decisions.

As well as these economic benefits, particular language competences can also confer non-material advantages (see De Schutter and Ypi 2012). For example, the content of a person's language repertoire may influence their opportunities to form friendships and relationships, to access medical care and other emergency services, to engage with official and commercial institutions, to negotiate complex social environments, or to effectively exercise their social and political rights. Thus, speakers

of privileged languages, because they can communicate with others more efficiently, may turn out not only to be wealthier than their linguistically disadvantaged peers, but also to be more secure, better able to form meaningful relationships and more empowered.[2]

Linguistic Disadvantage and Public Policy

As this brief survey indicates, there are numerous ways in which having a particular language repertoire can advantage or disadvantage someone within a given linguistic environment. However, there is no self-evident way to rank these different inequalities according to their normative significance, and people who experience them may have contrasting preferences about which are of greater or lesser importance. For example, some people might experience unequal access to political influence as the most important linguistic inequality, others might feel that unequal employment prospects are more important, and still others might worry more about the costs of social isolation. This raises a puzzle about whether it is possible to compare different people with different preferences and different language skills according to their overall level of linguistic advantage or disadvantage. Performing such comparisons is important, since unless we can do so it is difficult to see how we might normatively evaluate proposed

[2] In addition to all of these inequalities, some political theorists argue that the public standing of one's ancestral language, and especially whether it is officially recognised, can also be an important linguistic inequality (see, e.g., Patten 2014). This might be because languages are an important part of our cultural structures, which supply us with a 'context of choice' that makes personal autonomy possible (Kymlicka 1989, 1995). On this view, people who lack a stable linguistic environment in which their ancestral language has a secure position are less likely to be capable of making meaningful choices than people whose primary language is afforded public recognition and support. Another related argument is that the public visibility of one's language is an important form of public recognition, and that people whose linguistic identities are routinely ignored by public institutions or misrecognised by them are less likely to secure adequate dignity or self-respect (Taylor 1994). I do not directly address these inequalities in this paper.

language policies according to their anticipated effects. For instance, unless we can form assessments of someone's overall level of linguistic advantage or disadvantage, we will not be able to tell whether an alteration in their linguistic environment or to their language repertoire will improve or worsen their situation.

The importance of having a single standard for comparing the situations of people with different language repertoires can be illustrated by considering the following pair of examples. First, suppose that a multilingual society proposes to introduce English as a second language in the school system. Because it will replace a minority official language in this role, this policy can reasonably be anticipated to have the following two effects: people who would be otherwise unlikely to gain mastery of English will be able to access employment opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them; and speakers of the minority language that was previously taught as a second language will have fewer opportunities to use that language in both formal and informal settings. Unless we can compare these different gains and losses, and the others to which the policy might give rise, it will be impossible to reach a considered judgement about whether the policy ought to be recommended.

Second, suppose that a largely monolingual society is contemplating introducing subsidies for majority-language learning programmes, targeting immigrants who are not proficient in that language. Unlike the previous policy, the future earnings gains this policy is likely to generate for immigrants will almost certainly offset any future losses for other groups (such as majority language speakers who will lose some of their competitive advantage in the labour market). However, because the policy itself will introduce new costs, both for participants who are required to invest in language learning and for whoever is required to subsidise the programmes, in order to know

whether such a policy is to be recommended we will need to know the severity of linguistic disadvantage currently experienced by immigrants. For example, if immigrants who are not competent in the majority language already have adequate employment and social opportunities available to them, then perhaps the policy will not be justified.

There are numerous other contexts in which policymakers may find it beneficial to have a standardised means to allow them to compare how well people with different language competences fare within a particular linguistic environment. In order to make decisions about whether addressing some particular linguistic inequality is a priority, they will also need some way to determine how significant a particular linguistic inequality actually is. Combining these things together suggests that policy makers need a 'metric' of linguistic disadvantage and that it ought to satisfy two criteria. First, it should provide a common standard for comparing the situations of people with different language repertoires. Second, it should also provide a common standard for comparing inequalities with a linguistic dimension against other social, economic and political inequalities.

It is worth emphasising that any particular metric does not, as such, imply any normative conclusions about how or whether particular inequalities ought to be addressed, and that making decisions about these things will require additional normative principles, which I do not discuss here. Certainly, it seems likely that many linguistic inequalities are justifiable, both from the perspective of justice itself and from the perspective of what we ought to do, all things considered. On the one hand, some linguistic inequalities are probably neither unfair nor unjust, since they are produced by choices for which individuals ought to be held responsible, such as decisions about

supplementary language learning. On the other hand, some linguistic inequalities probably cannot be ameliorated, at least not without imposing excessively burdensome costs, such as the disadvantages experienced by voluntary and temporary migrants with respect to navigating their social environment.

Thus, a complete normative account of what to do about linguistic inequality will need to combine three things: an account of what kinds of linguistic inequalities matter; a means for comparing these inequalities to other ones; and an account about when linguistic inequalities demand redress. This paper addresses only the first and second of these challenges, and not the third. Proceeding in this way seems sensible, since we need to understand linguistic disadvantage itself before we can make principled decisions about how it ought to be distributed. Hence, in the remaining parts of this paper I set out four rival conceptions of linguistic disadvantage and evaluate them according to the criteria specified above. These metrics specify which dimensions of a person's situation are relevant for the purposes of comparing how they are faring, and they yield different verdicts about whether particular language repertoires are advantageous or disadvantageous in a given linguistic environment.

Inadequate Opportunities for Communication

According to the first conception, a person suffers linguistic disadvantage when they have inadequate opportunities for communication, because within their linguistic environment they are only able to communicate without mediation amongst a relatively (or absolutely) small number of people. The rationale for this view is straightforward: a language repertoire that equips its holder to communicate with more people is clearly

advantageous in at least one respect by comparison with a language repertoire that equips its holder to communicate with fewer people. For example, a monolingual immigrant who cannot speak the most widely used language in his society experiences linguistic disadvantage in this sense, and this disadvantage will be lessened if he learns the majority language (or if other people learn his language). Of course, whether or not a language repertoire is disadvantageous depends on the linguistic environment at stake. A monolingual Dutch speaker may have relatively few potential communication partners in Italy, but not in the Low Countries.

One feature of this conception of linguistic disadvantage is that it treats a person's language repertoire as a resource, the value of which depends on the languages that other people speak within their linguistic environment. As such, people will qualify as linguistically disadvantaged either when their language repertoire has a relatively low value, or when its value falls beneath some threshold. Different strategies might be employed to compute the value of a language repertoire. One approach is to calculate the sum of potential communication partners a person has available to them, and then to rank different language repertoires according to whether they include languages with greater or lesser proportions of speakers. Thus, the more prevalent the languages in a repertoire, the less the linguistic disadvantage. However, comparing language repertoires according to the sheer number of communicative partners available to someone might undervalue some languages and some language repertoires. For example, knowledge of a former colonial language in a newly independent state is often highly prized, and more so than knowledge of more widely known languages, if it provides its speakers with access to high status employment opportunities. Thus, Abram de Swaan instead recommends computing the value of a language repertoire by

combining the prevalence of the languages it contains with their centrality, whereby centrality is understood in terms of the proportion of multilingual speakers who are familiar with at least one of the languages in the repertoire. This approach delivers a 'Q-value', which can serve as a 'rough-and-ready measure' for the 'communication value' of either a language or a language repertoire in a particular linguistic environment (de Swaan 2001, 39).

Just as there are different ways to compute the communication value of a language repertoire, there are different ways to assess whether or not a language repertoire qualifies as disadvantageous on this approach. On the one hand, we might rank each language repertoire in a given linguistic environment on a single scale, and designate those which deliver a less than average communication value as disadvantageous. Thus, a person will qualify as linguistically disadvantaged if she can communicate with fewer people than the average member of their society can, or if the Q-value of her language repertoire is less than the average Q-value. On the other hand, we might instead identify an absolute threshold. As such, a person might qualify as linguistically disadvantaged if she can communicate with fewer than 20% (say) of the members of her society, or if the Q-value of her language repertoire falls beneath some specified figure.

Regardless of how it is formulated, this approach can only deliver a partial and limited understanding of linguistic disadvantage, and it has two main shortcomings. The first arises because it assumes that all communicative opportunities are equally valuable, and that languages (or language repertoires) are more valuable if they supply speakers with more communicative opportunities. However, having fewer communicative opportunities might not always be disadvantageous, since some communicative

opportunities are more important than others. For example, suppose that we compare a variety of different language repertoires according to the proportion of communicative partners each speaker has available to them (that is to say, according to the prevalence of the languages within each person's repertoire). Someone whose repertoire has a relatively low score might nevertheless have an adequate range of educational and employment prospects. Furthermore, their employment prospects might dramatically improve without the languages in their repertoire becoming more prevalent (for instance, as a result of changing recruitment practices by multinational firms). In cases like these, even if having relatively few potential communicative partners is a form of disadvantage, it seems counter-intuitive to say that it is normatively significant. Moreover, incorporating the centrality of the languages within a repertoire does not solve this problem, since knowledge of a language that is spoken by multilinguals does not necessarily correlate with improved circumstances. Often, of course, people whose language repertoires have a higher Q-value will be advantaged by comparison with people whose language repertoires have a lower Q-value. However, it is not Q-value (or prevalence) as such that is normatively significant, but rather what a language repertoire equips its holder to be, do or get within their linguistic environment.

The second shortcoming is that this approach is unable to provide a common standard for comparing inequalities with a linguistic dimension to other social, economic and political inequalities. Consequently, it may obscure the ways in which inequalities with a linguistic dimension intersect with other inequalities. For example, imagine a society with two main language groups, and where bilingual university graduates earn more, on average, than monolingual graduates. Although bilinguals fare better than monolinguals overall in this society, bilingual high-school graduates receive

similar wages to monolingual high-school graduates, and both groups tend to earn considerably less than monolingual university graduates. Thus, a language repertoire with a high Q-value delivers a wage premium only for people with university degrees. No doubt it still makes sense to say that in this society bilinguals are advantaged by comparison with monolinguals, but a conception of linguistic disadvantage that focuses solely on the range of potential communicative partners a person has available to them will obscure much of the normatively salient detail in a situation like this.

Unsatisfied Preferences

The second conception of linguistic disadvantage asks about the extent to which a person's own preferences are satisfied within their linguistic environment. Earlier we saw that people might have different views about which linguistic inequalities are more or less significant – some might be more concerned about diminished political influence whilst others might be more concerned about the costs of social isolation, for example. Rather than treating disagreements like these as a problem, we might instead say that a person is linguistically disadvantaged when they are unable – for linguistic reasons – to do the things they care about, or to achieve the outcomes they value. Thus, for example, whether a migrant with poor employment prospects qualifies as linguistically disadvantaged will depend on their own preferences about occupational choice. Similarly, the members of a linguistic minority who are prevented from using their own language when communicating with public officials will qualify as linguistically disadvantaged if and only if this is something that they themselves care about.

One attraction of this approach is that it reflects variations in the salience of different language issues both between and within language communities. This is something that some normative theories of language policy have already sought to incorporate. For example, David Laitin and Rob Reich (2003) argue that it would be rash to assume that all members of a linguistic minority favour official recognition or language promotion policies. Thus, they suggest that (most) decisions about language policy ought to be settled democratically, since cultural, social and political action can reveal the intensity of people's preferences about languages. Unlike Laitin and Reich's proposal, however, the view under consideration does not incorporate a procedure through which people reveal their preferences. Instead, it assumes that we already know what people's preferences are, and then uses this information to identify the extent and distribution of linguistic disadvantage.

In addition to incorporating information about individual preferences, this approach also seems to satisfy the two desiderata mentioned earlier. First, it allows for the comparison of people on the basis of their language repertoires. Noticeably, and in contrast to the first conception, this approach disallows comparisons of groups defined by their linguistic abilities, since group members might have contrasting preferences. For example, some minority language speakers might attach a high priority to being able to find rewarding employment in their ancestral language, whilst others may not. Instead, this approach insists that the units of comparison are individuals themselves. Thus, it ranks each member of a society according to the extent to which their preferences are satisfied, and picks out those who are disadvantaged by reference to their position in the overall ranking. Second, this approach also allows us to compare inequalities with a linguistic dimension against other social, economic and political

inequalities. This is because we can compare cases in which people's preferences are unsatisfied for linguistic reasons against those in which their preferences are unsatisfied for other reasons. Thus, it might deliver the conclusion that the members of an ethnic minority are more disadvantaged by an underfunded school system than by the absence of official language rights, if it turns out to be the case that the former is responsible for a greater number of unsatisfied preferences than the latter.

Despite these merits, this approach is vulnerable to at least two serious objections. First is the problem of external preferences, which are preferences about how goods and opportunities ought to be assigned to others (Dworkin 1977, 234-6). Members of a majority language group, for example, might have a strong preference that only their language be granted official recognition, and that people not be permitted to use other languages in public institutions. According to the current conception, and counter-intuitively, a policy of official bilingualism could be a source of linguistic disadvantage for the members of this group, even if it had no serious impact on the opportunities and resources available to them. Second is the problem of adaptive preferences, in which people willingly accept limited opportunities, often as a result of internalising the values implicit in their oppression (Sen 1992, 55). For example, suppose that an immigrant with poor majority language skills accepts their own limited employment prospects, and does not prefer greater occupational choices. On the current conception, the immigrant does not qualify as linguistically disadvantaged, and policies to improve their circumstances would lack a justification.

Diminished Access to Resources

The third conception of linguistic disadvantage asks about what a language repertoire equips a person to 'get' within a linguistic environment. According to this view, a person is linguistically disadvantaged within a given linguistic environment either when her language repertoire enables her to get fewer external resources than average, or when it enables her to get less than some absolute threshold of external resources. For example, someone whose employment opportunities are sharply curtailed because of her limited familiarity with the majority language will qualify as linguistically disadvantaged on this view, whilst someone with rare and highly marketable language skills will likely qualify as linguistically advantaged.

This conception of linguistic disadvantage is strongly intuitive. Not only was it implicit in some of the criticisms already registered against the first conception, but it is also the view assumed by many economic analyses of inequalities with a linguistic dimension, such as those which explore the labour market performance of groups defined by their language skills. Although wage inequalities are clearly an important linguistic inequality, they are not the only resource whose distribution is influenced by linguistic factors. For example, speakers of high-prestige languages are often advantaged in competition for political office, and people familiar with official languages often experience reduced transaction costs when accessing public services. Consequently, this metric of linguistic disadvantage will require two things. First, a means for *selecting* the resources whose distribution ought to be assessed when making judgements about linguistic disadvantage. Second, a mechanism for *ranking* inequalities in those different resources, so as to make it possible to compare unequal access to, say, cultural products with unequal access to political office.

Two different strategies might be employed to satisfy these desiderata. On the one hand, we might compare different language repertoires according to whether they equip people to access a specified range of resources, selected and ranked on the basis of their *objective* value. On the other hand, we might instead select and rank resources *procedurally*, without making any assumptions about the objective value of particular resources. In the end, as we shall see, both options face similar difficulties. Nevertheless, it is worth spelling each alternative out in order to establish the variety of ways to assess the distribution of linguistic advantage according to people's access to resources.

To begin, suppose that we base our metric on an objective ranking of resources, such as by adopting or modifying John Rawls's list of social primary goods. These are flexible, transferable and multipurpose goods that free and equal citizens would agree are important, in the sense that it would be rational to prefer a greater share of them. Rawls's list includes the basic rights and liberties, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities, the powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority, income and wealth, and the 'social bases of self-respect' (Rawls 2001, 58-9). These goods seem suitable for our purposes, since linguistic environments influence their distribution, in the sense that people are likely to have greater or lesser shares of them depending on their language repertoires. For example, and all other things being equal, the linguistic environments of both India and the European Union offer those who speak English wider occupational choices than those who do not, since many administrative posts require English-language competence. Likewise, and as we have seen, most linguistic environments offer economic rewards for speakers of particular languages, such as majority languages,

official languages and the lingua franca. Additionally, many political communities also privilege native speakers of official languages when it comes to allocating political office, either through informal mechanisms such as voter discrimination or through formal rules (as in Belgium, for example, where candidates for the European Parliament must be competent in the language of the constituency).

Any objective approach, and not just the Rawlsian one, must make (controversial) assumptions about which resource inequalities matter and about how to rank the comparative importance of different resources. The second strategy avoids this by instead designing a neutral procedure to select and rank the resources that are to be compared. One way to do this would be to employ something like Ronald Dworkin's hypothetical insurance scheme (Dworkin 2000, 73-83). Here, we first find out what people would be willing to pay in order to purchase insurance against being deprived of particular resources. In turn, this exercise will reveal which resources are, as a matter of fact, highly prized in a particular society, and this will allow us to rank different resources according to their significance. Finally, equipped with this list, we can go out and compare people's actual situations. On this approach, being unable to access resources that are highly valued by your fellow citizens will count for more than being unable to access less widely sought after resources. Thus, unlike the objective approach, whether or not a particular linguistic inequality matters will depend on the beliefs and preferences of your fellow citizens.

One difficulty raised by both approaches concerns the comparison of inequalities in the distribution of different resources. As we saw earlier, being able to rank linguistic disadvantage on a single overall scale is highly desirable, since otherwise it will be difficult to tell whether an alteration in a linguistic environment improves or

worsens someone's overall position. However, some philosophers who embrace resourcism endorse pluralism, implying that inequalities in different kinds of goods cannot be reduced to a single scale or to one another (Rawls 1999, 36-40; see also Wolff & De-Shalit 2007, 23 & 31-4). If they are right, then having a greater share of one resource (such as money) cannot be directly compared with having a lesser share of another resource (such as occupational choice). This problem afflicts both the objective and procedural strategies, since it implies that although people can have rational grounds for preferring A to B, they cannot rationally compare gaining 100 units of B to gaining 10 units of A. So, in the case of the procedural strategy, even if people did express a preference about the latter during the course of purchasing a hypothetical insurance package, that preference would lack a rational basis.

Even if pluralism is true, such that inequalities in one resource-domain cannot be compared to inequalities in another resource-domain, there might nevertheless be both objective and procedural grounds for believing that some resources, as such, are more significant than others. This, roughly speaking, describes Rawls's view, who allocated different weightings to different resources. For example, his favoured normative theory of 'justice as fairness' attached 'lexical' priority to the basic rights and liberties, stipulating that each person ought to have as much of this primary good as is consistent with everyone else having an equal share. At the same time, his theory was more permissive about inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth, since it assumed that these resources were less significant than the basic rights and liberties (Rawls 1999, 52-6 & 78-81). A procedural approach to ranking different resources might likewise arrive at a similar conclusion, albeit for different reasons.

Attaching different weights to different resources will certainly help when it comes to establishing an overall ranking of linguistic disadvantage. For instance, if we accept Rawls's ranking, then inequalities arising from direct discrimination will qualify as normatively weightier than those arising from the reward structure of fair employment markets. Furthermore, inequalities that involve deprivations in more than one resource or in a weightier resource will become visible. For example, suppose that X and Y both currently fare badly because their linguistic environment offers few employment prospects to people with their language repertoires: in X's case because her language repertoire does not include the official language, in Y's case because she is part of a stigmatised minority who regularly suffer employment discrimination. Although both have similarly small shares of one resource (income and wealth), Y also lacks another (basic rights and liberties), and (according to the Rawlsian ranking) is worse-off overall.

However, if pluralism is true, then we will be unable to make the kinds of fine-grained comparisons that are necessary to comprehensively assess changes in linguistic environments. For example, suppose that over time, Y comes to earn more than X, despite still facing discrimination. If we say that basic rights and liberties always matter more than income and wealth, then Y will continue to fare worse than X overall, however much she earns, since the resource she lacks is 'weightier' than the one X lacks. With respect to a resource like basic rights and liberties, this may well be true, for instance because it would never be rational for Y to accept improved employment prospects as compensation for the persistence of direct discrimination. However, amongst other resources it might indeed be rational to accept trade-offs like these, and it is the possibility of establishing when these would be rational that pluralism rejects.

Meanwhile, even if pluralism is not true, both objective and procedural strategies are vulnerable to a further objection, which is that diminished access to resources might be too narrow a way of construing linguistic disadvantage, because some inequalities with a linguistic dimension are not about resources in the first place. It is important not to exaggerate this objection, since inequalities that seem not to be about resources often are, if resources are construed in a broad enough way. For example, consider inequalities in the distribution of political influence, such as when people who are less familiar with dominant language(s) are less effective participants in democratic politics. This is describable as a resource inequality, since the current operation of the linguistic environment ensures that some people receive less value or worth from their political freedoms. Similarly, consider welfare, symbolic and cultural inequalities that have a linguistic dimension, such as when people suffer social isolation as a result of having limited communicative opportunities, or when someone's linguistic identity is afforded lesser symbolic recognition than comparable linguistic identities. These too are arguably describable as resource inequalities, if they cause people to lack confidence in the value of their own plans and projects, or in their capacity to pursue and fulfil their goals, since then they would constitute deprivations with respect to what Rawls describes as the most important primary good – the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1999, 440-5).

However, some inequalities with a linguistic dimension are more difficult to account for in this way. These include inequalities amongst people who, for linguistic reasons, are differently situated when it comes to achieving particular outcomes. For example, consider a society in which no one is prevented from accessing medical care, because translation services are provided where necessary. From the perspective of the

resourcist approach, the provision of translation ensures that everyone has access to the valued resource at stake. However, speakers of minority languages might nevertheless find it more difficult to secure good health, since they lack an option available to majority language speakers – i.e. to access the service in their L1. They do not lack the resource of medical care itself, but rather the linguistic environment diminishes their effective opportunity to realise a particular outcome.

Capability Deprivation

The fourth conception of linguistic disadvantage compares people not according to what their language repertoire equips them to get in a given linguistic environment, but according to what it equips them to be and do. According to this view, a person suffers linguistic disadvantage when for linguistic reasons they are unable to function in a fully human way. This conception applies the capability approach, originally suggested by Amartya Sen (1980, 1992, 2009) and developed by Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1992, 1999, 2011), both of whom proposed comparing people's situations by looking at their capabilities to function in particular ways. A functioning is what a person can do or be. More specifically, it is a valuable activity or a state of being that is constitutive of well-being. Functionings might be simple (such as being nourished, literate or healthy) or more complex (such as being happy, being in good health, having self-respect or participating in social life). In turn, a capability is the ability to achieve a functioning, or a combination of functionings. Thus, capabilities are sometimes described as 'real' or 'substantive' freedoms, since a person has the capability to do or be something only if he is effectively able to do so. For example, a person might lack the capability to

achieve the functioning of affiliating with others because he cannot afford socially appropriate clothing. Or, he might lack the capability to achieve the functioning of being in good health because he lacks access to adequate medical care. Meanwhile, if social arrangements were adapted, giving him the real opportunity achieve these things, he would come to possess freedoms he previously lacked.

The most basic difference between this approach and the previous ones is that it proceeds by comparing people's effective abilities rather than what they have. As such, it incorporates the insight that people might be disadvantaged not only because they lack particular resources, but also because of the operation of social norms or the influence of environmental factors. As Nussbaum summarises the view:

> We ask not only about the person's satisfaction with what she does, but about what she does, and what she is in a position to do (what her opportunities and liberties are). And we ask not just about the resources that are sitting around, but about how those do or do not go to work, enabling [the person] to function in a fully human way. (Nussbaum 2000, 71)

Nussbaum (2011, 17-45) uses the term 'combined capabilities' to capture the sense in which a person's 'substantive' freedom consists in a combination of their 'internal capabilities' and the political, social and economic environment. On her account, a person has a 'combined capability' to do or be X if they have the internal capability to do or be X *and* if there are no social, political or economic circumstances that impede or prevent them from doing or being X. Here, 'internal capabilities' refer to a person's trained or developed traits and abilities, such as their skills and dispositions, including their language repertoire. A person might have highly sophisticated 'internal

capabilities', but lack the effective opportunity to employ them. For example, someone might be 'internally capable' of free speech, but lack the opportunity to practice it if she lives in a repressive society. Meanwhile, someone might live in a society that upholds the right to free speech, but lack the 'internal capability' to think critically or to speak publicly about political affairs. In either case, she lacks an effective freedom, and this can be captured by saying that she is deprived of an important capability.

When applied to the identification and measurement of linguistic disadvantage, the capability approach draws attention to the ways in which linguistic environments combine with language repertoires to deprive people of the effective ability to achieve particular (and valuable) outcomes. For example, take the functioning of being in good health. For the capability theorist, what matters is not simply having good health, but being substantively free to achieve it, which means having the 'combined capability' to do so. In turn, this requires not only having access to the necessary external resources, but also have the effective ability to take full advantage of those resources, which - as we saw – may be compromised if someone is unable to access medical services in a language she is comfortable with. Similarly, a person might have a diminished capability to use her senses, thought and imagination in a fully human way if she is unable to experience literary and musical works in a language she is intimately familiar with. Or, her capability to form and maintain relationships with others might be compromised if she cannot effectively communicate her hopes and fears with other people.

It would be arduous and perhaps impossible to evaluate a linguistic environment by trying to identify every respect in which it frustrates a person's real freedom to do or be particular things. Moreover, such an exercise would be normatively fruitless, since at

any given time even the most disadvantaged individual will likely have the capability to achieve a wide variety of functionings. Fortunately, capability theorists do not believe that all functionings are equally valuable, and they emphasise the importance of particular functionings, focussing on those which are essential for living a truly human life (Sen 1992, 44-6). Although Sen (2005, 158) refuses to set out a complete list of functionings, Nussbaum (2011, 33-4) has proposed a list of ten central capabilities, which she thinks are essential ingredients of a dignified human life. These include things such as being able to have good health, being able to move freely without risk of violence, being able to use one's senses and imagination, being able to have emotional attachments, being able to form and revise one's life plan, being able to care for others, being able to play and enjoy recreational activities, being able to participate effectively in political decision-making, and being able to enjoy meaningful employment.

Although Nussbaum's own list of capabilities has attracted controversy (Alkire 2002; Claassen 2011; Sen 2004), something like it will be required if this conception of linguistic disadvantage is to satisfy the two desiderata stipulated earlier. This is because unless we can compare people according to their freedoms to achieve a specified list of functionings, it will be impossible to tell whether one language repertoire impairs people to a greater or lesser extent than another, or whether capability deprivations that are the result of linguistic factors are more or less serious than other capability deprivations. Once a list is in place, the idea of linguistic disadvantage as capability deprivation might be understood in one of two ways. Either we say that a person is linguistically disadvantaged when they have the capability to achieve fewer of the listed functionings than the average member of their society, or we can use a list of functionings to specify a threshold that establishes a social minimum, such that

someone qualifies as linguistically disadvantaged if for linguistic reasons they lack the capability to achieve any of the identified functionings.

Both alternatives are vulnerable to a worry similar to one previously directed at the resourcist view, namely that the different functionings might be incommensurable. As such, even if we know that one person lacks the capability to achieve functioning A (but not B), and that another lacks the capability to achieve functioning B (but not A), we might be unable to say who is worse-off overall. This problem is magnified if we also accept that with respect to at least some functionings, people can be impaired to greater and lesser extents. So, for example, someone's capability to achieve the functioning of enjoying meaningful employment might be better or more secure than someone else's, even though neither entirely lacks the relevant capability.

Although these difficulties are serious, they do not fatally undermine this approach to measuring linguistic disadvantage. One strategy for dealing with them is to say that the capability to achieve a particular functioning ought to be understood in terms of meeting an adequacy threshold (Nussbaum 2006, 291-4). This would allow us to take each functioning in turn and establish whether linguistic circumstances contribute to depriving a person of the capability to achieve it. The results of this exercise will not establish the overall distribution of linguistic disadvantage, since incommensurability implies that we cannot know whether being unable to achieve the functioings of P and Q is better or worse than being unable to achieve the functioning of R. However, it would allow us to compare people's linguistic situations in a rough-and-ready way. Moreover, since people are compared according to their ability to achieve specified functionings, this approach would also ensure that inequalities with a

linguistic dimension are compared on a common basis with other social, economic and political inequalities.

Suppose, then, that the capability approach to measuring and identifying linguistic disadvantage survives the pluralism objection. It might nevertheless be objected that the approach itself is redundant, since capability deprivation with a linguistic dimension nearly always arises either because a person's ancestral language is not widely used, or because their language repertoire does not include a locally dominant language. For example, deprivation in the capability to engage with cultural products in one's native language is typically experienced by people whose ancestral language is not widely used, and deprivation in the capability to interact socially is often experienced by people whose language repertoire has a low Q-value, such as immigrants. Thus, the capability deprivation conception of linguistic disadvantage might be rejected on the grounds that it does not tell us anything that the first conception did not.

However, although the prevalence and centrality of the languages within a person's repertoire can explain some forms of linguistic disadvantage, it is not these things as such that matter. This can be illustrated by considering cases in which capability deprivation can be satisfactorily addressed without adjusting the Q-value or the prevalence of the languages within a person's repertoire. For example, suppose that an elderly immigrant cannot access medical services using a language she understands and is instead forced to rely on the goodwill of her friends and family to translate medical advice for her, which she finds embarrassing and which compromises her independence. Although she currently lacks an important capability because her language repertoire has a low Q-value, her disadvantage could be addressed by altering

her linguistic environment and without increasing the communicative value of her repertoire, for instance through the public provision of translation services or a public listing of family doctors in her region who can speak her language.

Similarly, consider a minority language which for some reason has relatively few cultural products. Few novels are published in it, no radio or television programmes are broadcast in it, and artists prefer to use other languages since they get better returns by doing so. Speakers of this language arguably experience a capability deprivation, since they cannot exercise their senses and imaginations in a language they are intimately familiar with. Again, however, although this capability deprivation arises because the language has a low-Q value, it might be satisfactorily addressed by altering the linguistic environment and without increasing the Q-value of that language, for instance through the public provision of minority language arts broadcasting, or by harnessing web-based technologies.

A puzzle raised by this approach to measuring linguistic disadvantage concerns whether 'verbal independence' qualifies as a distinct functioning. This has been proposed by Wolff and De-Shalit, who define it as 'the functioning of being able to communicate, including being able to speak [and understand] the local language' (2007, 60; see also 50). In support of this, they discuss a range of cases in which people are disadvantaged because they are not verbally independent, such as Russian-speaking alcoholics in Israel who were unable to participate in courses to curb their addictions, and immigrant parents who were unable to negotiate complex bureaucracies to get their children into better schools. However, although not being verbally independent is frequently a source of disadvantage and may undermine a person's ability to live in a fully human way, it is unnecessary to treat it as a separate functioning. Whilst verbal

independence often is a condition for having the capability to achieve some other important functionings, it is never a necessary condition, since in theory at least people could achieve all of the other functionings without it. Thus, it might be better to say that lacking verbal indepdence can (and often is) a source of disadvantage, but is not itself a form of disadvantage.

Conclusion

Linguistic disadvantage is a pervasive feature of linguistically diverse environments. It arises because linguistic environments inevitably reward different language repertoires unequally, and it cannot be entirely eradicated, at least not without erasing language differences themselves. In order to know when linguistic inequalities demand attention, we need an account of which inequalities with a linguistic dimension have normative priority. Furthermore, such an account will enable us to normatively evaluate proposed language policies according to their anticipated effects, helping us to see whether an alteration in someone's linguistic environment will improve or worsen their situation. However, formulating such an account is a challenging task, since people have different preferences, causing them to disagree about which linguistic inequalities matter.

As this paper has demonstrated, policy makers might identify and measure the normatively salient properties of linguistic disadvantage in four different ways. The first treats a person's language repertoire as a resource, whose value depends on the language skills of others. Conceiving of linguistic disadvantage in this way suggests that it ought to be addressed by adjusting people's language repertoires, so as to increase the communicative value an individual receives from their language repertoire. This is

unsatisfactory, however, since some forms of linguistic disadvantage can be corrected with requiring people to learn additional languages. The second approach instead focuses on how satisfied people are with their linguistic environments, and says that people suffer greater linguistic disadvantage according to the extent to which they are unable to do things they care about for linguistic reasons. This approach suggests that linguistic disadvantage ought to be addressed either by altering the content of people's language repertoires or by removing barriers in their linguistic environments. Although this approach is preferable to the first one, it is nevertheless vulnerable to some of the standard objections to using preferences for measuring welfare.

The third and fourth approaches are more promising. The third equates linguistic disadvantage with diminished access to resources, and recommends comparing different language repertoires according to the share of external resources their holders have access to. Meanwhile, the fourth focuses on what a language repertoire equips a person to be and do within a given linguistic environment, and equates linguistic disadvantage with capability deprivation. As should hopefully be clear from the preceding analysis, the fourth conception of linguistic disadvantage will capture a wider range of linguistic inequalities than the third. This is arguably an attractive implication, since linguistic environments can deprive people of capabilities even when they equip them with an equal (or adequate, or fair) share of resources. For example, a linguistic environment might not disadvantage an immigrant labourer with only limited fluency in the majority language when it comes to securing employment, but it may do so when it comes to participating in politics, accessing medical services, exercising their imagination or senses, or forming and maintaining relationships with others. Indeed, people might be unable to achieve a variety of functionings despite having adequate opportunities for

employment and without having any reasonable grounds for complaining about their share of primary goods. Thus, provided that a satisfactory list of capabilities can be agreed upon, the final approach to measuring linguistic disadvantage is the most promising.

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